

*List of Orthodox peoples around 1754-1771 in the
Book of the Precious Bee by archpriest Michael
Brayk, of Damascus*

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Macarius patriarch of Antioch. *Collection containing many stories and meanings* مجموع يشتمل على اخبار و معاني كثيره. Manuscript 136, Catholic Greek archdiocese of Aleppo. (Virtual Hill Museum and Manuscript Library).

Register of Sylvester patriarch of Antioch. Manuscript 210, Missionary Society of Saint Paul in Harissa, Lebanon. (Virtual Hill Museum and Manuscript Library).

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1. Michael Brayk:

Michael Brayk (*Mīxāyīl Brayk* ميخائيل بريك) was an Orthodox Greek Roman from Damascus. In 1748, he was ordained deacon then priest by metropolitan Nicephore, procurator for Sylvester patriarch of Antioch, in Damascus.¹ In 1750, he was ordained archpriest by metropolitan Nicephore.² In 1767, Philemon patriarch of Antioch appointed him procurator of the church of Damascus.³ In 1768, Daniel patriarch of Antioch appointed him abbot and procurator of the monastery of Saydnaya; he served only one year.⁴

He wrote:

1) *Chronicle of the Damascenes* تاريخ الدمشقيين.⁵ From 1720 to 1781.

2) *The names of the patriarchs of great Antioch* اسامي بطاركة انطاكية العظمى.⁶ From apostle Peter to patriarch Daniel in 1767.

3) *The collection of the histories of times and the flower of the marvels of the universe and time* جامع تواريخ الأزمان وزهرة أعاجيب الكون والأوان.⁷ It was written in 1765.

4) *The book of the precious bee for the necessities of the servants of the church* كتاب النحلة النفيسة في لوازم خدم الكنيسة. The excerpts published here are from this book.

¹ Brayk, *Chronicle*, p. 20.

² Brayk, *Chronicle*, pp. 23-24.

³ Brayk, *Chronicle*, p. 87.

⁴ Brayk, *Chronicle*, p. 92-93.

⁵ Brayk. *Chronicle of the Sham*.

⁶ Brayk. *The clean truths*. Brayk. *The reliable truths*.

⁷ Brayk. *The collection*.

2. *The Book of the Precious Bee:*

The full title of the book is: *the book of the precious bee for the necessities of the servants of the church* كتاب النحلة النفيسة في لوازم خدم الكنيسة. The book was composed between 1754 and 1771.

The copy used here is manuscript 95 of the Monastery of Balamand. It was copied in 1771 by priest Neophytus the monk in Damascus (pp. 128b, 184b).

The content of the book is the following:

1) *Exposition of the months, the beginnings of years, and the seasons* (pp. 1b-3b). This part was taken from a certain sage or physician (*hakīm*).⁸ This sage is unknown. He was knowledgeable in astronomy. He was from the Sham⁹ or Egypt as proven by the local words he used like *nīrūz*. The text published here is a section of this part.

2) *Computation of the paschal cycle* (pp. 4a-128a). This part was taken from a computation done by archpriest Atallah Ibn Kharuf, of Tripoli, and from the *Evangelistarium* of Glyzonius published in Venice in 1754 and 1755.

3) *Explanations concerning the Gospel of the Canaanite* (pp. 129a-131a). This part was taken from the *Evangelistarium* of Glyzonius.

4) *Tables showing the lections of Sundays of the year according to the movable dates of Easter, from 22 March to 25 April* (pp. 131a-184a). This

⁸ In the spoken Arabic language of Sham, *hakīm* can mean either sage or physician.

⁹ The Sham (or Bilad al Sham) corresponds to the vilayet of Damascus and the vilayet of Aleppo. However, this name was used before the Ottoman period. During the Ottoman period, the Sham was called Arabistan, while Damascus was called the Sham.

part was taken from the *Evangelistarium* of Glyzonius. Thomas Dascalus¹⁰ the monk helped Michael in composing this part.

¹⁰ Tūmā al Daṣkalus توما الدصكلس.

3. Text and translation:

Text

[1b]

قال الحكيم كل طائفة من بني البشر اتفقت على تاريخ

فاول ذلك شهور الروم 12

اولها ايلول ، تشرين الاول 2 ، تشرين الثاني 3 ، كانون الاول 4 ، كانون الثاني 5 ، اشباط 6 ، اذار 7 ، نيسان 8 ، ايار

9 ، حزيران 10 ، تموز 11 اب 12

هذا الترتيب رتبوه اولاد ادم من اول ايامهم

و اما شهور العرب بنى هاجر

اولها محرم 1 صفر 2 ربيع الاول 3 ربيع الاخر 4 جماد الاول 5 جماد الثاني 6 رجب 7 شعبان 8 رمضان 9 شوال 10 ذى

القعدة 11 ذى الحجة 12

و بدو تاريخهم سنين الهجره و شهورهم قمرية و اولها محرم شهر [2a] ثلاثين و شهر تسعة و عشرون

و اما شهور القبط

اولها توت 1 بابه 2 هاتور 3 كيهك 4 طوبه 5 امشير 6 برمهان 7 برمودة 8 بشنس 9 باونه 10 ايب 11 مسره 12

كل شهر ثلاثين يوم و يورخوا لقتل الشهدا و بدو تاريخهم شهر توت و هو تاسع و عشرون شهر اب الرومى و هو قطع راس يوحنا المعمدان و يسموه عيد النيروز و يجعلوا اخر السنه كسور خمسة ايام و يسمونها خمسة النسي و كل اربعة سنين يكبسوا يوم فتصير الخمسة ايام سته كمثل الروم و هذا هو التاريخ المشهور

قال الحكيم اما اليهود خزهم الله تعالى شهورهم قمريه و تاريخهم لبدو الخليقه و اول شهورهم ايلول و حكم سنتهم شمسيه لانهم يكبسوا كل سنه احد عشر يوم و هى تقارب السنه الشمسيه فيطلع حكم السنه حكم الشمس و تاريخهم انقص من تاريخنا

قال الحكيم اما النصرارى كل طايفه منهم اتفقه على تاريخ بذاتها لان طايفه السريان تاريخهم للاسكندر ملك اليونان و اول شهورهم تشرين الاول

قال الحكيم اما طايفه الافرنج يورخوا لتجسد السيد المسيح و بدوا تاريخهم اول شهر اذار

قال الحكيم اما طايفه الروم و كل من اعتقاده ملكى حتى الروس مثل الكرج و الشركش و الروس و الفلاخ و الاس [2b] و السرب و البلغر يورخوا لكون العالم و بدو تاريخهم شهر ايلول و هو اول السنه

قال الحكيم اما نحن الروم فالسنه عندنا ثلثمائيه و خمسة و ستين يوم و ربع و كل اربع سنين يطلع اربعة ارباع بتقدير الله عز و جل فنجعله زياده لشهر اشباط فيصير تسعه و عشرون و نقول كبيس و هذه الارباع على ما ذكر الحكيم الذى اوقف يشوع ابن نون بها الشمس و الله اعلم

Translation

[1b]

The sage said:

“Each group of humans agreed on a dating.

Firstly, the months of the Romans (*al Rūm*) 12:

The first one of them is September. October 2. November 3. December 4. January 5. February 6. March 7. April 8. May 9. June 10. July 11. August 12.

This order was ordered by the sons of Adam since their first days.

As for the months of the Arabs, sons of Hagar (*al ‘Arab banī Hājar*):

The first one of them is Muharram 1. Safar 2. Rabi‘ the first 3. Rabi‘ the second 4. Jumada the first 5. Jumada the second 6. Rajab 7. Sha‘ban 8. Ramazhan 9. Shawwal 10. Dhulqi‘dah 11. Dhulhijjah 12.

The beginning of their dating is the year of the migration. Their months are lunar and Muharram is the first one of them. One month [2a] is 30 and one month is 29.

As for the months of the Copts (*al Qubṭ*):

The first one of them is Thout 1. Paopi 2. Hathor 3. Koiak 4. Tobi 5. Meshir 6. Paremhat 7. Parmuti 8. Pashons 9. Paoni 10. Epip 11. Messori 12.

Each month has 30 days. They date from the killing of the martyrs. The beginning of their era is Thout, which is the 29th of the Roman month August and the beheading of John the Baptist; they call it the feast of *nīrūz*. They

make the end of the year into fractions of 5 days and they call them the five epagomenae. Every 4 years, they add a day, then the 5 days become 6 like the Romans. This is the famous dating.”

The sage said:

“As for the Jews (may God bring them to shame!), their months are lunar. Their era is from the beginning of creation. Their first month is Elul. The rule of their year is solar because they add 11 days each year. It is close to the solar year, therefore the rule of the year is like the rule of the sun. Their dating is less than our dating.”

The sage said:

“As for the Christians, each group of them agreed on a certain dating. The era of the group of the Syrians (*al Suryān*) is that of Alexander king of the Greeks (*al Yūnān*) and their first month is October.”

The sage said:

“As for the group of the Franks (*al Ifranj*), they date from the incarnation of Christ and the beginning of their dating is the 1st of March.”

The sage said:

“As for the group of the Romans (*al Rūm*) and all those, whose doctrine is Melchite (*Malkī*), extending until the Russians (*al Rūs*), like the Georgians (*al Kurj*), the Circassians (*al Šarkaš*), the Russians (*al Rūs*), the Vlachs (*al Falāx*), the Ossets (*al Ās*), [2b] the Serbs (*al Sirb*) and the Bulgars (*al Bulğar*), they date from the creation of the world. The beginning of their dating is the month of September, which is New Year’s Day.”

The sage said:

“As for us, the Romans (*al Rūm*), the year among us is 365 days and $\frac{1}{4}$. Every 4 years, four quarters occur by the destiny of God, then we make an addition into the month of February, which becomes 29 and we say it is bissextile.” These quarters according to the saying of the sage are the days in which Joshua son of Nun stopped the sun. God knows more.

4. Ethnological content:

The peoples mentioned in this text are the following:

1) the Arabs, sons of Hagar (*al 'Arab banī Hājar*)

2) the Copts (*al Qubṭ*)

3) the Jews

4) the Christians:

1) the Syrians (*al Suryān*)

2) the Franks (*al Ifranj*)

3) the Romans (*al Rūm*)

4) all those, whose doctrine was Melchite (*Malkī*), extending until the Russians (*al Rūs*):

1) the Georgians (*al Kurj*)

2) the Circassians (*al Šarkaš*)

3) the Russians (*al Rūs*)

4) the Vlachs (*al Falāx*)

5) the Ossets (*al Ās*)

6) the Serbs (*al Sirb*)

7) the Bulgars (*al Bulğar*)

From this, the following conclusions can be deducted:

- 1) The doctrine of the Romans, Georgians, Circassians, Russians, Vlachs, Ossets, Serbs and Bulgars was the Melchite doctrine. The Melchite doctrine is the orthodox doctrine.
- 2) The name “Melchites” was not the exclusive name of the Orthodox people of the patriarchies of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria.
- 3) The Orthodox of the Sham and Egypt were Romans. The sage was from the Sham or Egypt (cf. 2) and he explicitly states his belongingness to the Romans by saying “as for us, the Romans”.
- 4) Romans, Georgians, Circassians, Russians, Vlachs, Ossets, Serbs and Bulgars were distinct peoples.
- 5) The name “Romans” was not equivalent to “Orthodox”.

The following must be noted here:

- 1) The Vlachs mentioned here are those of Wallachia and Moldavia. Although the Vlachs are Romans (specifically Latin Romans), the Greek Romans were usually ignorant of this fact and called them as Vlachs. However, Macarius patriarch of Antioch says explicitly in 1665 that the inhabitants of Wallachia and Moldavia were Romans.¹¹
- 2) The following Orthodox peoples are not mentioned: the Albanians, the Armenians, the Lazes and the Abkhazes.

¹¹ Macarius, *Collection*, pp. 182-184.

3) The name “Melchites” before 1700 was usually reserved for the Romans. This is why the sage says: “the Romans (*al Rūm*) and all those, whose doctrine was Melchite (*Malkī*)”.

4) By abuse of the original meaning, expressions like “Roman by doctrine” or “to become Roman” started to be used by the common people since the late 17th century. However, this secondary meaning is evidently not used in this text here.

All these proofs refute the unfounded false claims and ethnological falsifications of Constantin Panchenko in his book *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans* (pp. 18-23).¹²

¹² Panchenko, Constantin A. *Arab Orthodox Christians under the Ottomans: 1516-1831*. Holy Trinity Seminary Press, Jordanville, New York. 2016.